



GAZA CONFLICT AUGUST 2022

# Operation BREAKING DAWN: An assessment

by Col. Richard Kemp

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**HLMG**  
HIGH LEVEL MILITARY GROUP

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On the afternoon of Friday 4th August, the IDF launched Operation BREAKING DAWN, targeted strikes into Gaza against what Prime Minister Lapid described as an “immediate threat”. This is the first of the major Gaza conflicts (beginning with Operation CAST LEAD in 2008) in which Israel has launched a pre-emptive strike rather than responding to rocket fire from Gaza. The first target to be hit by the IDF was Palestinian Islamic Jihad’s (PIJ) northern commander, Tayseer al-Jabari who was killed by an air strike in his apartment building.

That evening, commencing around 2100 hrs Israel time, terrorist groups in Gaza began a barrage of rocket fire aimed at Israel, amounting to approximately 350 missiles by the following evening (Saturday 6th). Many of these missiles reportedly landed inside the Gaza Strip and those heading for populated areas in Israel were intercepted by Iron Dome. The operation is ongoing at the time of writing.

IDF Chief of Staff Aviv Kohavi says Operation BREAKING DAWN has two main goals:

- To prevent all attacks.
- To critically attack the Islamic Jihad organization, in Israel, in Judea and Samaria, and all other sectors.

## **BACKGROUND**

Following the Gaza conflict in May last year, a significant escalation in terrorist activity began in the West Bank. This was led by PIJ, (funded mainly by Iran and effectively an Iranian proxy), Hamas and the Al Aqsa Martyrs Brigade (Fatah-linked and funded). PFLP and DFLP have also been involved at a lower level. Several attacks were subsequently launched against Israeli forces and civilians, including 19 dead in March and April alone. Many of the attackers were killed in clashes with the IDF, which markedly increased its West Bank counter-terrorist actions, code-named Operation Breakwater, in coordination with Shabak, to counter the new level of activity.

Last Monday, 1st August, in Jenin, the IDF and Shabak arrested Bassam Al-Saadi, the head of PIJ in the West Bank, together with his aide Asharaf Al-Jada. During the operation another Palestinian terrorist was killed. Initial Palestinian media reports suggested Al-Saadi had been wounded while being apprehended and PIJ placed their fighters in Gaza and the West Bank “on alert”. To calm tensions the IDF released a photo of Al-Saadi in custody showing he was unharmed.

On Tuesday 2nd August the IDF and Israel Border Police closed roads and the railway adjacent to the Gaza Strip as well as agricultural areas. The Erez Crossing from Gaza into Israel was also closed to workers crossing into Israel (involving some 15,000 Gazans). This significant step was taken as a result of a “direct threat and in order to prevent a possible attack on civilians” according to the Israeli government. These areas have since remained closed.

## **OPERATION BREAKING DAWN**

On Thursday 4th August the IDF announced it was reinforcing the Gaza Division with infantry, tanks, artillery, combat engineers and special forces. Additional Iron Dome batteries were activated including in central Israel against expected missile attacks from Gaza into the immediate vicinity and beyond. The IDF is currently preparing to call up 25,000 reservists, some have already been deployed.

In addition to killing Tayseer Al-Jabari, the IDF reported on Friday night 5th August that they had eliminated a PIJ team that was intending to carry out an attack using anti-tank missiles, and since has targeted several other PIJ positions including missile and mortar launch sites. The IDF also reported conducting widespread arrest operations in the West Bank overnight 5th/6th August, apprehending more than 20 terrorists.

The overwhelming majority of attacks so far have been from rockets and mortars although there has been at least one incoming drone alert in Nahal Oz. The majority of rocket fire has been directed at the immediate area near Gaza, but attack warnings have also been sounded in Tel Aviv and Modi'in, Rishon Lezion and Holon (all in central Israel) with 2 missiles intercepted over Tel Aviv and 2 falling into the sea next to the city.

Of the approx 350 rockets fired by evening Saturday 6th August, 95 landed inside Gaza, 162 were intercepted and most of the remainder landed in open areas in Israel. Some houses and other buildings have been hit in Israel. IDF report that Iron Dome has a 95.9% success rate so far.

As well as PIJ, the following Gaza terrorist groups have claimed they fired rockets at Israel since the beginning of Operation BREAKING DAWN:

- Al Aqsa Martyrs Brigade.
- DFLP.
- PFLP.
- Martyr Abdul Qadir al-Hussayni Brigades (also Fatah-linked).
- Forces of the Martyr Omar al-Qassim Resistance Brigades.
- Nasser Salah al-Din Brigades.

So far Hamas has not taken a direct role in the attacks.

No Israeli deaths have been reported to date although two IDF soldiers and one civilian have been lightly wounded by shrapnel. The IDF estimated that 10-20 terrorists had been killed in the opening strikes and that two or three uninvolved civilians had also been killed. The Hamas-controlled Gaza health ministry claimed 15 deaths including a 5-year-old girl, and 80+ wounded as at evening 6th August.

The IDF says no negotiations are under way to end the fighting. But according to diplomatic sources, Egypt is mediating between Israel and PIJ and an Egyptian delegation was due to arrive in Gaza on Saturday 6th August.

## **ASSESSMENT**

It is likely that PIJ were not expecting Israeli pre-emptive action given the historic pattern and the general understanding that the IDF does not initiate conflict with Gaza. PIJ has issued public threats against Israel since the arrest of Al-Saadi. Such threats would not have triggered this operation. Israel would not have closed the area around Gaza and then launched a pre-emptive strike without concrete intelligence of PIJ intent to conduct attacks, led by Al-Jabari, the initial target of the IDF strikes.

PIJ and the smaller jihadist groups in Gaza lack the military capability for a sustained long-term campaign against Israel along the lines of the May 2021 war (11 days). The IDF has estimated the operation may last a week, but will endeavour to complete it in less time

Israel seems intent on limiting the operation in intensity and duration, including avoiding Hamas engagement. Since it began, ministers and spokesmen have repeatedly emphasised that Operation BREAKING DAWN is targeted against PIJ. The commander of the Gaza Division explicitly stated on Saturday that Hamas is not the

target of attacks. This is in contrast to previous statements holding Hamas responsible for all terrorist activity emanating from the Gaza Strip. PIJ undoubtedly want to bring Hamas into their offensive, with PIJ leader Ziad Nakhleh, who is currently in Tehran, asserting: “Fighters of the Palestinian resistance have to stand together to confront this aggression”.

While PIJ wants to cause maximum damage to Israel in line with its objectives and to satisfy its Iranian sponsors, it seems that Hamas is not ready at present for a further round of fighting, given the precarious state of Gaza following the conflict last year and to avoid antagonising Egypt. It is also likely that Hamas will not be displeased with its PIJ rivals being degraded by Israel. That does not mean it won't feel obliged to join the fight depending on events and pressures in the coming hours and days.

The UN Special Rapporteur for the Occupied Palestinian Territories, Francesca Albanese, has condemned Israel's operation, branding it in contravention of international law. The UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Tor Wennesland, said he was deeply concerned by the killing of a PIJ leader inside Gaza.

The White House position has so far been supportive, with the US Ambassador in Jerusalem saying: “The US firmly believes that Israel has a right to protect itself”. The administration is likely to avoid pressuring Israel to cease operations for at least several days, although an incident involving mass civilian casualties in Gaza could change that.

## **CEASEFIRE**

On 7th August 2022 at 2230 hrs Israel time a ceasefire between Israel and Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) came into force, mediated by Egypt. In the following 20 minutes the ceasefire was broken by three rocket barrages fired by PIJ, the last at 2350 hrs. Since then until time of writing there has been no further rocket fire into Israel or IDF operations into Gaza.

## **PIJ AND OTHER GROUPS ATTACKS/IDF INTERCEPTION**

Between 2100 hrs on 4th August and 2350 hrs on 7th August, PIJ and other terrorist groups fired 1,100 missiles towards Israel. Approximately 990 rockets crossed into Israel and approximately 200 landed in the Gaza Strip. 380 of the rockets that entered Israel were intercepted; most of the remainder landed in open areas and a few (number unknown at time of writing) damaged buildings and vehicles in Israel. The majority of missiles were fired at locations in the vicinity of the Gaza Strip. Jerusalem, Tel Aviv, Modi'in and other central Israeli towns were also targeted. The IDF claim approximately 96% success rate for Iron Dome.

## **IDF STRIKES**

The IDF struck 170 PIJ and other targets from the air, land and sea, destroying military posts and compounds, launch pits, weapons storage facilities, rocket launch pits and an attack tunnel. As well as other terrorists, IDF strikes killed Tayseer Jabari, PIJ's

northern commander and Khaled Mansour, PIJ's southern commander, for the time being decapitating the organisation. These were the most senior PIJ commanders in the Gaza Strip.

## **HUMANITARIAN**

For the duration of the conflict the IDF closed the Erez crossing from Israel into Gaza due to potential for PIJ to attack the crossing point endangering IDF soldiers and civilians (as Hamas did during the May 2021 conflict). This left the Gaza power plant out of fuel which could have led to severe humanitarian problems had the conflict continued for longer.

## **CASUALTIES IN ISRAEL**

No Israelis were killed by PIJ rockets or other munitions. Three (two IDF soldiers and a civilian) were lightly wounded by a PIJ mortar attack. A number of Israeli civilians were reported injured as a result of running to shelters etc.

## **CASUALTIES IN GAZA**

The IDF currently estimates the following deaths in Gaza during Operation BREAKING DAWN (all subject to confirmation):

Total killed: 47

PIJ etc fighters killed by IDF: 20

Uninvolved civilians killed by IDF: 7

Individuals killed by PIJ etc rocket misfires: 14

Deaths not yet known/under review: 5-7

Numbers of wounded are not yet known.

## **NOTABLE EVENTS**

**Overnight 5/6 August:** IDF and Shabak apprehended 19 PIJ suspects in the West Bank.

**6 August:** A number of civilians including 4 children were reported killed at Jabaliya in the Gaza Strip. Palestinians and media claimed they had been killed by an IDF strike. The IDF confirmed they had not struck the location where the deaths occurred and produced video and radar proof that the deaths were caused by a misfired PIJ rocket that dropped short into the populated area of Jabaliya.

## ASSESSMENT

This was undoubtedly a tactical victory for Israel, with severe degradation to PIJ military capability in the Gaza Strip and in the West Bank and elimination (for the present) of the cross border anti-tank missile threat. PIJ fired an intensive barrage of missiles in the evening as the cease-fire approached to try to secure some kind of narrative of victory. This had no significant effect but PIJ and other terrorist groups have nevertheless claimed major successes. In reality their only achievement, at some cost to themselves and the population of Gaza, was to disrupt life near the border with many Israelis spending much of the conflict in rocket shelters.

There was little impact across the rest of Israel and only minor disruption to flight patterns into and out of the country. Some visitors to Israel cancelled or postponed their trips although this is not believed to have serious impact. The IDF assess that PIJ will not re-start attacks in the near future.

Hamas did not engage in the conflict. It is likely that they were under pressure from Egypt to keep out, that they did not want further destruction in Gaza to add to the damage caused during the May 2021 conflict, and that they feared civilian unrest due to casualties and hardship. It is also assessed that Hamas were happy to see their PIJ rivals degraded by the IDF.

During the period before the start of Operation BREAKING DAWN, Hamas failed to prevent the severe PIJ anti-tank missile threat to Israel that caused closure of Israeli roads and the railway adjacent to Gaza and led to the IDF pre-emptive strike. Hamas did make an announcement before Operation BREAKING DAWN began that they were unable to control PIJ. It is not known whether this is correct or whether they didn't want to be seen as an Israeli collaborator.

Unlike in the 2021 conflict there was no significant unrest/violence from the Israeli Arab population and the West Bank remained relatively quiet. Jerusalem was also quiet despite 2,000 Jews attending the Western Wall for Tisha B'av. This may be due to the short duration and also Hamas keeping out. Hamas played a significant role in inciting the Israeli Arab population in 2021.

International media has shown relatively little interest in the conflict, with most attention on Ukraine.

The general perception in Israel is that the conflict was well-handled by the government and this will likely boost the electoral prospects for Lapid and Gantz. Netanyahu (as opposition leader) received security briefings from Lapid and gave an interview supportive of the government's efforts, saying that in these times there is no government and opposition in Israel, we are all pulling together. The US reportedly did not put pressure on the government to terminate the operation, although they may well have done so had the Jabaliya deaths been caused by the IDF.

This was the first major IDF pre-emptive strike into Gaza. Its tactical success, and the lack of expected overwhelming international condemnation of Israel for such action,

might encourage future such operations rather than waiting for Gaza terrorists to initiate conflict. It might also lead the Israeli government to more seriously consider future pre-emptive operations into southern Lebanon. Currently there is concern within the IDF that Hizballah might launch an attack when gas extraction operations in the Karish field near the disputed Israel-Lebanon maritime border begin, scheduled for September.

# HIGH LEVEL MILITARY GROUP

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**Colonel Vincent Alcazar** (United States) served as a fighter pilot in Operations Desert Storm and Southern Watch as well as various other post 9/11 theatres. He subsequently served in strategic roles at the Pentagon, the U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency and at the U.S. embassy, Baghdad, Iraq.

**Lieutenant General Michael D. Barbero** (United States) has served as Director of the Joint Improvised Explosive Device Defeat Organization (JIEDDO) from March 2011 until May 2013. He previously served in Iraq as the Commander of Multi-National Security Transition Command, and the Commander of the NATO Training Mission. Barbero has been awarded with the Defense Distinguished Service Medal, among others honors.

**General Vincenzo Camporini** (Italy) is the former Chief of Defense Staff of Italy. He served as Deputy Chief of Defense General Staff and President of the Italian Centre for High Defense Studies before being appointed Chief of Staff of the Italian Air Force and subsequently Chief of Defense General Staff.

**General Lord Richard Dannat** (United Kingdom) is the former Chief of the General Staff of the British Army. Dannat has previously served as the Military Assistant to the Minister of State for the Armed Forces and Assistant Chief of the General Staff. He has been honored with the Military Cross, the Queen's Commendation for Valuable Service and was appointed as Commander of the Order of the British Empire. Dannat is member of the House of Lords of the British Parliament.

**Lieutenant General Kamal Davar** (India) served as the first Director General of the Defense Intelligence Agency of India. A former Director-General, Mechanized Forces at Army Headquarters in 2001 he has held a large number of high ranking command posts in the Indian army and served on the Indian Military Training Team in Iraq.

**Lieutenant General David A. Deptula** (United States) was the principal attack planner for the Desert Storm coalition air campaign in 1991, served as Director of the Combined Air Operations Center in Afghanistan and served as the first Deputy Chief of Staff for Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR), Headquarters Air Force.

**Colonel Richard Kemp** (United Kingdom) was Commander of British Forces in Afghanistan as well as serving in Iraq, the Balkans, South Asia and Northern Ireland. He has led the international terrorism team at the UK's Joint Intelligence Committee and served as chairman of the strategic intelligence group for COBRA, the UK national crisis management committee.

**Brigadier General Alain Lamballe** (France) served in the General Secretariat for National as head of the Southeast Asia and Europe sections as well as heading the Central Liaison Mission for Assistance to Foreign Forces. He is the former Director of the Department of Security Cooperation of the OSCE Mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

**General Thomas James Lawson** (Canada) is a retired Royal Canadian Air Force general. Lawson was Chief of the Defence Staff of the Canadian Armed Forces from October 2012 to July 2015. He previously served as Deputy Commander of the North American Aerospace Defence Command.

**Major General Andrew James Molan** (Australia) served as the Chief of Operations for the Headquarters Multinational Force in Iraq. He is a former Commander of the Australian Defense College and has served as Adviser to the Vice Chief of the Australian Defense Force on Joint Warfighting Lessons and Concepts. **General Klaus Dieter Naumann** (Germany) is the former Chief of Staff of the Bundeswehr, the German armed forces and served as Chairman of the NATO Military Committee from 1996 to 1999.

**Ambassador Pierre-Richard Prosper** (United States) is the former the U.S. Ambassador-at-large in charge of the Secretary of State's Office of War Crimes Issues. A former Presidential envoy and adviser to the National Security Council he was previously a war crimes prosecutor for the United Nations International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda.

**Colonel Eduardo Ramirez** (Colombia) is an elected member of the Congress of Colombia who served with the Colombian National Police from 1987 until 2013. He was formerly the Chief of Security Staff for President Uribe of Colombia as well as Chief of Section at the Judicial and Criminal Directory of the National Police.

**Admiral José María Terán** (Spain) serves in the Office of Strategic Assessment of the Minister of Defense of Spain. A former Chief of the Joint Staff and Chief of the Strategic Analysis Group, he has also served as Director for Reorganization of the Spanish Intelligence Service.

**Rafael L. Bardají** is the Executive Director Friends of Israel Initiative and National Security Advisor to Former President, José María Aznar. He formerly served in the Government of Spain as the National Security Adviser and in leadership positions in the Ministry of Defense.

**Davis Lewin** is the Director of the High Level Military Group project.



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